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ABSTRACT

The content and materials of cultural instruction in elementary school second language courses are discussed. First, the availability of such materials is examined, and a model for deciding what to teach is presented. Four factors are included in this model: students' first language proficiency and the transfer of skills to the second language; developmental stages and the appropriateness of materials for each; methods and materials for teaching culture and assessing cultural learning; and culture themes to be included in the curriculum. Literature relating to each of these factors is reviewed. In relation to selection of culture themes, several approaches to selecting content are presented. Contains 27 references. (MSE)

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Teaching culture in the elementary foreign language classroom: Deciding what to teach

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Teaching culture in the elementary foreign language classroom: Deciding what to teach

The professional literature on the teaching of foreign languages reflects a history of concern about the teaching of culture. Foreign language teachers have been exhorted to integrate the teaching of culture with the teaching of language, to develop a national agenda for the teaching of culture, and to prepare preservice teachers to teach culture more effectively (Lewald, 1968; Strasheim, 1981; Tedick & Walker, 1994). Until the publication of the ACTFL Standards for foreign language learning (ACTFL, 1996), the discussion of culture had centered around some variation of the small c (daily life) and large C (formal) views of culture. The new standards suggest, however, that language educators consider culture as "the philosophical perspectives, the behavioral practices and the products – both tangible and intangible – of a society" (ACTFL, p. 43). Although the classroom teacher's approach to teaching depends in part on his or her own definition (Robinson, 1985), this new paradigm suggests new ways of teaching by focusing on the perspectives, practices, and products of the target culture. Nevertheless, elementary foreign language teachers may still find themselves asking, "Yes, but *what* perspectives, practices, and products do I teach?"

The literature on the teaching of culture in the foreign language classroom offers dozens of successful techniques. Moore (1994) notes the following approaches among many: culture capsules, culture clusters, culture assimilators, mini-dramas, micrologue, and the cultoon (p. 163). Other successful methods include the use of video to teach culture (Altman, 1989), current magazines (Friffin, 1987), multiple intelligences (Diaz & Heining-Boynton, 1993), as well as integrated approaches to teaching language

and culture (Crawford-Lange & Lange, D. 1987; Arries, 1994; Ballman, 1996). The literature also reflects an interest in exploring ways to assess culture learning (Lessard-Clouston, 1992; Moore, 1994). While these materials help the classroom teacher decide *how* to teach culture, "*What* to teach?" remains a troubling question. Curtain and Pesola (1994) note, "if culture is to play a significant role in the integrated language curriculum…it must be planned for as carefully and in as great detail as are the language and subject content elements of the program (p. 181).

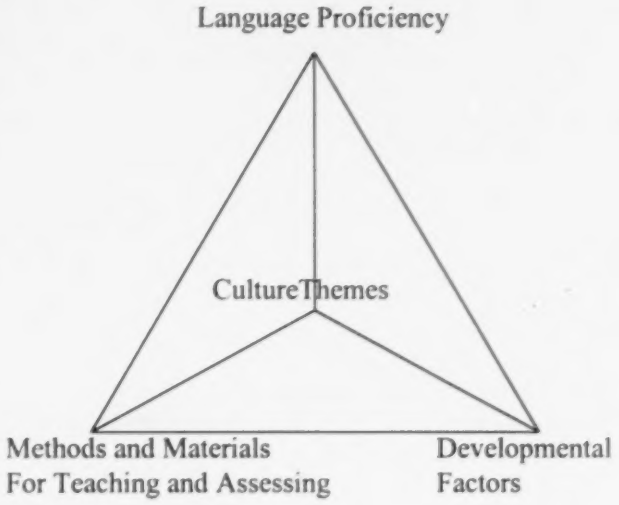
Many classroom teachers have relied on the textbook as the primary source of information in teaching about the target culture. The impact of the text is significant in forming students' attitudes and beliefs about the target culture (Byram & Esarte-Sarries, 1989). Unfortunately, textbooks often present stereotypical views of culture (Moore, 1993), views which are sometimes in conflict with the goals for foreign language education. Further, many elementary foreign language teachers develop their own instructional materials to support the themes they are teaching. Without a textbook as a source of information and a structure for teaching culture, elementary teachers may find themselves with few resources. Montgomery County Public Schools (1993) have developed manuals as well as scope and sequence materials for teachers of Spanish and French; the State of Indiana has developed a curriculum guide which integrates language and culture (Pesola, 1991). These are excellent resources for the classroom teacher, but are the rare exception in terms of instructional materials which can provide a structured, sequential approach for teaching culture.

Why is there a lack of resources for the elementary teacher? Perhaps the results of the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines for Culture suggest one possible answer. The

provisional guidelines for listening, speaking, reading, and writing were refined and adopted. Those for culture were dropped. The foreign language profession questioned the use of a hierarchy and asked if culture skills built progressively? Further, could culture skills be quantified as other language skills had been? How could formal and daily living culture be integrated (Byrnes & Canale, 1987)? The profession could not reach consensus on what should be included in assessing a speaker's understanding of the target culture. The issues raised at that time remain true today and underscore the difficulty of dealing with culture in the foreign language classroom.

Despite the challenges, foreign language teachers who want to include culture in their integrated language lessons are often left on their own in determining what to present in their classrooms. In the absences of standardized scope and sequence resources for teaching culture, the decision-making model proposed here is offered to help teaches answer many of the questions they must ask in deciding what to teach in terms of culture content. The model suggests that teachers consider four areas in making these decisions: the students' first and second language proficiency; developmental factors; methods and materials for teaching and assessing culture learning; and culture aspects themselves. The model suggests that, from teachers' questions in each of these areas, appropriate culture themes will emerge.

Figure 1: Factors to Consider



Language Proficiency

Although secondary and college-level foreign language teachers are not generally concerned about the students' proficiency in their first language, it is of concern for elementary foreign language teachers. Even though students usually enter elementary school with the essentials of their first language in place, there are many linguistic refinements which take place during the early years of elementary school (Papalia & Olds, 1993). If students have not yet mastered particular linguistic features of their first

language, it would be inappropriate to expect them to demonstrate a comparable skill in the second language.

In the same way, teachers will want to present a sequence of linguistic skills in the second language which will build on previous skills and which provide a foundation for second language development. The concept of proficiency has received a great deal of attention in the professional literature in recent years. Teachers who want to explore the topic in further detail will find a wealth of resources to consider.

Questions to consider:

What kinds of language functions will the students need to carry out the culture tasks?

Does the culture component require the use of language functions which students have already learned?

What new skills will be presented?

How will language and culture be integrated?

Developmental Factors

Just as students cannot be expected to master language functions in the second language when they have not mastered the skill in their first, students must be presented with cultural experiences which are developmentally appropriate.

The work of Robert Selman suggests an approach to social cognition in children and adolescents which may prove useful to elementary foreign language teachers as they consider aspects of culture to integrate into lesson plans. Sellman's work, based on Piaget and Kohlberg, focuses on role-taking, that is, the child's ability to assume another

person's point of view (Papalia & Olds, 1993). His model includes these five stages of role-taking (Musss, 1982, p. 507):

Stage 0	The egocentric undifferentiated stage (approximately age 3 to 6).
Stage 1	The differentiated and subjective perspective-taking stage (age 5 to 9).
Stage 2	Self-reflective thinking or reciprocal perspective-taking stage (age 7 to 12).
Stage 3	The third person or mutual perspective taking state (age 10 to 15).
Stage 4	The in-depth and societal perspective-taking stage (age 12 to adulthood).

At stage 0 children believe that their point of view is the only one possible; children understand thoughts and emotions by projecting their own onto others. At Stage 1 children realize that others may interpret a situation in a different way from their own; they are aware that different perspectives can lead to different behaviors. Although they understand that another person may hold a different perspective, they may not be able to tell what the other perspective is nor be able to see their own and that of the other person at the same time. They tend to believe that there is still only one acceptable point of view. Children at Stage 3 come to understand that their own perspective is not the only valid one, and they can reflect on their own actions as seen from the perspective of another. Additionally, no one individual's point of view may be the only acceptable one. At Stage 3 the early adolescent can imagine multiple points of view from the perspective of a neutral third party. During Stage 4 adolescents begin to compare their views with

those of their society. The adolescent sees that each person interprets the social system according to his or her own view.

These stages are not meant to be interpreted rigidly since individuals progress through them at their own rates. It seems important for teachers to be aware, therefore, that some culture topics may be beyond students' developmental level and, consequently, not appropriate. The introduction of culture topics for which students are not prepared may create unfavorable views of the target culture and perpetuate stereotypes created intentionally or unintentionally by the teacher or outside media (Taylor, 1975; Esarte-Sarries, 1989).

Methods and Materials for Teaching and Assessing Culture

When selecting methods for teaching culture, the classroom teacher has a variety of techniques from which to choose. The elementary foreign language teacher is advised to select cautiously since some methods seem to have been developed with secondary or college-level students in mind. Further, though not explicit, the descriptions of some methods suggest a level of discussion that would be beyond many students' abilities in the second language. The implication is that some culture discussions would be carried out in the first language. Nevertheless, a wide range of methods and techniques for teaching culture are described and are available to foreign language teachers in current methods textbooks (See, for example, Chastain, 1988; Omaggio Hadley, 1993; Curtain & Pesola, 1994). Of equal importance to the methods of teaching are methods of measuring culture learning. In addition to traditional testing methods, portfolios, for example, offer another means of assessing students' culture learning (Moore, 1993; Moore, 1994).

These may include writings, drawings, videos or other products which demonstrate that students have met instructional goals for learning about the target culture (Diaz & Heining-Boynton, 1996).

Questions for consideration:

Which methods would be most effective in teaching culture content?

Are the topics and the methods compatible with students' language proficiency and developmental levels?

Does the method lend itself to a meaningful experience with the culture?

How can the culture content be assessed?

Does the method lend itself to a variety of learning styles? How will differences in learning styles be accommodates?

Culture Themes

Because elementary classroom teachers will want to present culture in the same systematic manner in which they teach language functions, they may find a theoretical framework essential in their planning. While the foreign language community has not come to agreement on the teaching of culture, there are several sources which classroom teachers could in planning for their own consistent instruction. Seelye's (1984) seven goals for the teaching of culture have been included in several textbooks (See Chastain, 1989; Omaggio Hadley, 1993; Curtain & Pesola, 1994) and offer one possibility. Lafayette has also created a list of goals for classroom instruction which have been widely disseminated through textbooks and articles (See Moore, 1993; Omaggio Hadley, 1993; Curtain & Pesola, 1994). Chastain offers a list of 37 cultural themes (1988). An

extensive list of "universals of culture" is included in Pesola (1991). The ACTFL Standards for foreign language learning (1996) with its cultural focus on perspectives, practices and products offers the most contemporary approach.

Perhaps equally useful for the elementary foreign language teacher is Saville-Troike's (1978) Guide to culture in the classroom. Although intended for bilingual classroom teachers, her chapter "Questions to ask about culture" could be used by elementary foreign language teachers as well. Her questions are grouped into twenty categories as listed below:

1. General
2. Family
3. The life cycle
4. Roles
5. Interpersonal relationships
6. Communication
7. Decorum and discipline
8. Religion
9. Health and hygiene
10. Food
11. Dress and personal appearance
12. History and traditions
13. Holidays and celebrations
14. Education
15. Work and play
16. Time and space
17. Natural phenomena
18. Pets and other animals
19. Art and music
20. Expectations and aspirations

Within each category Saville-Troike offers a series of questions for teachers to ask themselves concerning the topic. Under the category "Pets and other animals" for example, she poses the following questions:

a. Which animals are valued, and for what reasons?
b. Which animals are considered appropriate as pets; which are inappropriate, and why?

c. Are particular behavioral prescriptions or taboos associated with particular animals?
d. Are any animals of religious significance? Of historical importance?
e. Are there seasonal restrictions on talking about or depicting certain animals (e.g. except when hibernating, during hunting season)?
f. What attitudes are held toward other individuals or groups which have different beliefs and behaviors with respect to animals?
g. Which animals may be kept in the classroom? Which may not, and why? (p. 32).

Questions to consider:

What is my own personal definition of culture?

In order to carry out language functions, what cultural information will the students' need?

Does the culture topic provide an opportunity for students to experience the culture in a meaningful way?

Is the topic part of a sequence of culture themes? How does it relate to past topics and how might other topics build on it?

Are appropriate resources available to teach the topic?

Conclusions

Classroom teachers who are trying to integrate language and culture may find themselves without a culture blueprint. They must design their own plans concerning what products, practices and perspectives are most appropriate for their students. It has been suggested here that, by asking themselves questions about culture and methods for teaching culture as well as questions about their students' language proficiency and developmental levels, teachers will be better able to make decisions about selecting the culture content for their classes.

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